

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT CAMERON
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC
LANDS, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES,
CONCERNING S. 144, THE NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL ACT**

April 29, 2004

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, my name is Scott Cameron, and I am the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance and Management at the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Committee to present the Department's views on S. 144, the "Noxious Weed Control Act of 2003."

The Department commends Congress for bringing attention to this important issue that has significant impacts on both public and private landowners and land managers across the country. Invasive plant species are estimated to cause more than \$20 billion per year in economic damage, and injure the environment on millions of acres of private and public lands. In total, invasive plants, animals, and microorganisms have been estimated to cost over \$100 billion in the United States each year.

We concur with the principles embodied in the legislation, specifically the recognition that a concerted, coordinated, and comprehensive effort by the public and private sectors with requisite accountability is critical to the successful prevention, control, and management of invasive plants. But note that the goals of this bill can be met within existing authorities and that funding for this bill is not included in the President's FY 2005 budget. Any new funding would have to compete with existing programs.

Programs to Promote Private Partnerships

Aware that approximately 70 percent of America's lands are in non-federal ownership, we embrace our opportunities to communicate, consult and cooperate with private landowners. Over the past 75 years, we have worked extensively with our partners in the states, tribes, sportsmen, ranchers, and farmers as well as our federal colleagues at the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide technical assistance and grants to help states and private landowners achieve their land management and conservation goals, while providing benefits for migratory birds, fish and other species.

There are a large number of grant programs administered by the Department that could be a potential tool for addressing invasive plants. Some of these include the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, popularly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, which provides funding for the selection, restoration, rehabilitation and improvement of wildlife habitat, wildlife management research, and the distribution of information produced by the projects. The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, commonly referred to as the Dingell-Johnson act, was modeled after the Pittman-Robertson Act to create a parallel program for management, conservation, and restoration of fishery resources.

In addition to these programs, and on a day-to-day basis, we work closely with nongovernmental organizations and private landowners to improve efforts for cooperative weed management in the

west, water management districts in Florida, and small landowners everywhere who want to restore habitat for fish and wildlife. We have had success. For example, the Cosumnes River Project is a broad-based effort to restore and safeguard the integrity of the Cosumnes River and its surrounding landscape. The Nature Conservancy and its partners established the Cosumnes River Preserve in 1987. By 1998 the preserve had grown to some 13,000 acres. Habitat restoration including control of invasive plants has been the goal of the preserve. Land owning partners in the project include both private organizations and public agencies: Bureau of Land Management (within the Department); California Department of Fish and Game; California Department of Water Resources; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Open Space, and Recreation; The Nature Conservancy of California; and Wildlife Conservation Board. Financial support has come from all of them, plus the intergovernmental CalFed Bay-Delta Program; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; EPA; and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

TEAM Leafy Spurge, in North Dakota, represents another instructive example. Federal agencies joined with private landowners to increase the productivity of western rangelands and at the same time improve the conservation values of National Park and National Forest rangelands in North Dakota. In 1997, USDA Agricultural Research Service selected TEAM Leafy Spurge as the first area-wide integrated pest management program to focus on a weed pest. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service co-managed the 5-year program. More than two million leafy spurge eating flea beetles were collected and redistributed to ranchers, landowners and land managers in the Little Missouri River drainage. In 1999, TEAM Leafy Spurge hosted "Spurgesfest '99" in Medora, North Dakota, where approximately 250 ranchers, landowners, land and weed managers, and extension agents from 18 states and several Canadian provinces attended the educational and informational event. Sponsors included Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota State University, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), BASF Corporation, Dow Agrosiences Corporation and Monsanto. The television series NOVA on PBS captured the enthusiasm of all the participants in a video program showing how ranchers, scientists, and weed specialists joined forces to knock back leafy spurge on public and private lands working together over a very productive five-year period.

Grant Programs Promoting Partnerships

Other partnering programs include the cooperative conservation component of the challenge cost share programs in the BLM, National Park Service (NPS) and FWS. These programs emphasize building partnerships for the conservation of natural resources and provide expanded opportunities for land managers to work with landowners and others to form creative conservation partnerships.

The Secretary's Cooperative Conservation Initiative recognizes that nature knows no jurisdictional boundaries and that, through these partnerships, the Department's land managers can work with partner landowners and other citizen stewards to tackle invasive species, reduce erosion along stream banks, or enhance habitat for threatened and endangered species. Among other things, in FY 2004 we have funded through this initiative projects that are aimed at the control of tamarisk, Russian olive, leafy spurge, yellow starthistle, and other invasive plants, and rehabilitation of impacted lands.

Our State and Tribal Wildlife Grants programs are designed to provide financial assistance for development and implementation of state- or tribally-directed programs and individual projects that address the needs of the species and habitats most in need of conservation, address the species conservation needs that are most in need of funding, and leverage federal funding through cost-sharing provisions. These programs exemplify our cooperative conservation approach by helping

states tailor conservation efforts so that they best fit local conditions, and provides yet another tool for states to use to address the significant impacts of invasive species on native habitats. In fiscal year (FY) 2004, Congress appropriated \$69.1 million for this program. Based on the high level of interest from states and tribes, as well as the demonstrated need for cooperative conservation programs like State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, the President's 2005 budget includes \$80.0 million, a \$10.9 million increase over the FY 2004 level.

The FWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program promotes private landowner cost-share projects for habitat restoration, including funds targeted for control of invasive plants and subsequent restoration. The Partners Program has worked with private landowners across the Nation to remove, burn, biologically control, and otherwise combat invasive plants on thousands of acres of wetlands and upland. The program has also allowed us to develop a closer working relationship with USDA, and farmers and ranchers, by providing technical assistance for wetlands easements and restoration under the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. This close association with soil and water conservation districts at the field level has yielded benefits not only to private landowners interested in conservation of migratory bird habitat or other species of local interest, but also helps us strategically improve habitats for rare and vulnerable species. I might add that these programs are focused in areas where we have existing lands or easements, and the voluntary habitat restoration projects help us achieve our resource protection mission.

The control and management of invasive plants is also part of BLM's Partners Against Weeds Strategy Plan, BLM's Strategic Plan, and the National Fire Plan. The Partners Against Weeds program funds cooperative efforts with landowners to control invasive species, and it funds cooperative outreach and education projects with schools and local and county governments. In one important project, the BLM plans to work with several groups, including Clark County and the communities of Bunkerville and Mesquite in southern Nevada, to remove tamarisk along portions of the Virgin River floodplain. Tamarisk here poses a potential fire risk to homes, ranches, farms, and recreational facilities in the wildland-urban interface, and this project involves mechanical removal of tamarisk in the project area. The goal of the project is to move away from the tamarisk-fueled, high intensity fires that are now typical of the area and to restore native vegetation, such as the relatively inflammable grasses, sedges, cottonwoods, and willows. Current planning calls for 95 acres of treatment in FY 2004, with an additional 100 acres per year during the following 7-8 years.

Partnering for Research

The NPS, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the Bureau of Reclamation partner with the Agriculture Research Service and the U.S. Forest Service, both within the USDA, and university scientists to develop and test biological control agents, including the beetles used for biological control of tamarisk in the West, to conduct studies of stream flow management for vegetation control, to study hybridization and environmental tolerances to better predict the potential future spread of invasive plants, and to map, using these predictive models, the potential increase of various invasive plant species for targeted early detection and rapid response.

USGS scientists can help identify site potential for water salvage, revegetation, and wildlife value, and develop protocols and measures for ranking sites for control or revegetation. The USGS also has partnerships with state and county weed departments, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Colorado-based non-profit Tamarisk Coalition aimed at mapping currently invaded sites and identifying new invasions. The USGS also has ongoing studies mapping tamarisk in Western Colorado and Southern Utah, relating its distribution to environmental factors at

USGS stream gauging stations throughout the West, assessing vegetation changes over time in tamarisk habitat on the lower Colorado River, and promoting restoration of native vegetation through water management.

The Bureau of Reclamation leads, along with USDA's Agricultural Research Service, the Saltcedar Biological Control Consortium, a task force comprised of over 40 agencies. The Bureau of Reclamation, in collaboration with Los Alamos National Laboratory, is developing new technologies for determining the amount of water lost from the Rio Grande River due to tamarisk.

These are only a few of the Department's numerous joint efforts focused on the control of invasive plants. Working closely with state Agriculture and Fish and Game Departments, Departmental agencies continue to test new partnerships and technologies to stem the spread of invasive plants like leafy spurge and tamarisk.

Crosscut Budget for Fiscal Year 2004

The Administration is also working toward an interdepartmental approach to invasive species control. The President's Budget Request for FY 2005 contains a performance budget crosscut on tamarisk, building on an earlier effort in FY 2004. Agencies worked together to develop common goals, definitions, strategies, and performance measures. Under this performance umbrella, new and base funds are being applied in the Departments of Interior and Agriculture to control and manage the spread of tamarisk in the Southwest.

Within the Department, BLM proposes to control 2,750 acres of tamarisk with its \$500,000 FY 2004 funding increase. The Bureau of Reclamation, utilizing \$600,000 in new funding this year, proposes to control 22,000 acres of tamarisk. The FWS has a FY2004 increase of \$640,000 for treatment of tamarisk and other species on an additional 50,000 acres, and the NPS, utilizing \$200,000 in funding, proposes to treat 1,000 additional acres. A FY 2004 increase of \$100,000 will help the Bureau of Indian Affairs control tamarisk on 4,000 acres. Finally, USGS has an increase of \$300,000 for two additional research projects in direct support of land management efforts, including the development of protocols and measures to prioritize sites for control and revegetation efforts.

In addition, both Departmental and USDA agencies are working together with our state and local partners to develop and implement control technologies as part of an integrated approach to pest and weed management. New chemical and biological control methods for tamarisk are being tested under strictly controlled conditions because the endangered southwest willow flycatcher occupies areas now infested with tamarisk that were once occupied by stands of native willows and cottonwoods. Federal agencies are providing support for a multi-pronged approach to tamarisk control utilizing prevention, early detection and rapid response, and other control and management activities to limit the introduction and spread of tamarisk into new areas of the Southwest.

Team Tamarisk: Cooperating for Results Conference

In FY 2005, the President's budget contains a \$1 million increase for tamarisk control that was budgeted for use as an incentive for Southwestern States to come together and develop a set of overarching guiding principles and a strategic framework to help coordinate efforts to address this weed. To start that process, the Department and USDA, working through the National Invasive Species Council, together with many other partners including the National Association of Counties, The Nature Conservancy, Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories, National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation, WERC, the Coachella Valley and Mission Springs Water Districts, the Center for Invasive Plant Management, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, and the Tamarisk Coalition, just concluded a strategy conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The purpose was to ask stakeholders to develop guiding principles, a strategic framework, and quantitative performance measures that we could use together to target grant program funding for state, local, or regional entities for tamarisk control and management. While the conference accomplished a great deal, we continue to work with stakeholders across the West to finish the job begun in Albuquerque. The Department can use existing grant programs for high priority invasive weeds activities without any new statutory authority.

S. 144, the Noxious Weed Control Act

We welcome several changes to the bill since its introduction in the Senate, including the addition of clarifying definitions, administrative streamlining by clarifying the advisory committee role, the addition of Indian tribes, deferral to the Secretary for setting the criteria for allocation and the use of funds, and the addition of a reporting requirement.

Given the current budgetary climate, however, we must acknowledge that funding for this bill is not included in the President's FY 2005 budget. As a practical matter, this bill would have to compete with currently authorized programs in the Department – including potentially other state and local grant programs.

I would also like to discuss program performance issues related to this bill. Without a strategic framework and performance measures for tracking the effectiveness of the invasive weed grants, it would not be possible for the Department and the states to tell the Subcommittee if we achieved results. For this reason the Department is working with states on the development of state wildlife grant plans, these plans will be used to target grant funding for priority wildlife conservation actions. The plans will identify major threats to wildlife, and could include invasive species. We can build off the NISC crosscut, mentioned previously, which allows the Department to present budget materials explaining implementation of invasive weed activities which not only estimate the costs of a project but also its projected results.

As has been well documented by scientists and weed managers alike, we need to think about what happens to a piece of land after the weeds are killed. Rehabilitation and monitoring would therefore be essential components of any weed management proposal. Finally, as with our Tamarisk initiative we should continue to encourage interstate projects tied to a strategic regional approach, address all invasive weeds, and do so in an integrated fashion, possibly on watershed basis.

National Invasive Species Council

I would also like to mention the National Invasive Species Council (Council), which is co-chaired by the Departments of the Interior, Commerce and Agriculture. The Council provides coordination on invasive species issues, including invasive plants, and encourages partnership efforts to prevent and control invasive species.

Executive Order 13112 initiated two new bodies specifically to increase collaboration: the National Invasive Species Council, comprised of 12 federal agencies, and the Invasive Species Advisory Committee, a non-federal committee that provides consensus input on policy and management issues related to invasive species. The Council, after extensive interaction with its Advisory Committee and

the public, issued the first National Management Plan in January 2001. Implementation of the plan has resulted in publication of early detection and rapid response guidelines, analysis of major pathways for introduction and spread of invasive species, and development of a joint web site for dissemination of professional policy information and public outreach information. The Council's Control and Management Committee is completing work on draft guidelines for ranking invasive species projects in natural areas, an important concern of land managers from both the Department and USDA. The Council's website, found at www.invasivespecies.gov, is a good example of outreach and coordination in its capacity as the nation's invasive species information system.

Finally, by working on an interdepartmental performance-based crosscut invasive species budget, the Council has encouraged agencies to work together to address common problems. The FY 2005 effort highlights ten inter-agency initiatives, with strategic performance measures, for four specific invasive species – brown treesnake, emerald ash borer, leafy spurge/yellow starthistle, and tamarisk – as well as more general performance-based initiatives on ballast water, prevention through education, aquatic area monitoring, early detection and rapid response, and innovative control technologies.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, the Department appreciates the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss the issue of cooperative invasive plant management. We, too, have recognized the need to work directly with private landowners and state and local governments. As such, we applaud the bill's recognition of partnerships as key to success across multiple jurisdictions of natural resource management.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I am happy to answer any questions you or other Subcommittee members might have.